

# Committee on Resources

## Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

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### Witness Testimony

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Testimony of David Borum

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### Forest Roads, Community Right to Know Act

Madam Chairman,

I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to testify before your sub-committee, it is indeed an honor. My name is David Borum and I am representing **Southern Four Wheel Drive Association**. Our association is made up of many local clubs and families located in TN, NC, SC, GA, AL, and KY. Our members elect the officers in our club and all the positions are **unpaid**. We accept these positions because of the love of our sport of four wheel drive's and the opportunity to recreate with our families in the USDA National Forest. We volunteer many hours each year in the National Forest doing maintenance on our trails. Members even volunteer their own equipment, such as backhoes and dozers, to keep the OHV (Off Highway Vehicle) trails environmentally friendly to the forest. Our Association has won the **Forest Service Chief's Award** for our volunteer efforts. This is the highest award that a group can receive from the forest for volunteer efforts and it was an extreme honor for us to receive. To my knowledge we are the only motorized group to have ever earned this award.

I live in Tellico Plains, TN which is on the border of the Cherokee National Forest; this makes this bill even more important to me. In fact, I have never testified before and this is important enough for me to take off

from work in the hope that this bill will be recommended and passed. There is nothing worse to go to the National Forest and find a road or trail you have ridden for years closed with no input.

One of the forest services objectives is to provide **recreation**. The following are facts found by the **Forest Service GPRA** (Government Performance Results Act) and the **National Forest Service Road System Use Report** compiled by **Gearld Coghlan Jan. 30, 1998**. Since 1950 there has been a **1000%** (one thousand percent) increase in motorized uses in the National Forest. In 1997 the forest service reported that 18% of the lands that it manages where designated Wilderness, where roads aren't allowed or have been closed, yet less than 2% of the forest visitors visited Wilderness.

On the other hand, forest roads, managed by the Forest Service, comprise less than 2 % of the forests land mass, yet in 1997, 13,600,000 vehicles traveled forest service roads **everyday!** This is another reason why this bill is important. The forest service now closes roads and trails that they think have no recreational value without knowing that there are people using these roads. Hunters, Fisherman, Hikers, Campers, Equestrians, Motorcycles, ATV's, Fourwheel drive vehicles, etc, could be using and recreating on these trails. ( I, and most in our association, do all the recreations listed above) This is why public comment is so important before closures should be allowed to occur. There could be several situations that pertain to the road being closed that the forest service didn't know about or consider.

This bill would take **nothing away from the agency**. It simply allows the public the opportunity to be involved in the management of it's public lands.

A couple of years ago, Cherokee National Forest closed roads in the Citico area near the town of Vonore, TN. They did this without any public comment. Later the forest service found out that the roads they closed were being used regularly by many people in the area for hunting, people just visiting the forest, and even the wagon train. When the forest service was asked why the roads were closed, no reason was given except for the District Ranger saying, "because I said so". The people in the town got together because they didn't want to see their public land closed and got our Congressman involved, Congressman Duncan, and he called a town meeting with the forest service. The forest service was overwhelmed when nearly the whole town showed up, filling the school gym to capacity with people still lining up outside. This time when he was asked why, he had no reason and the roads were opened back up. This could have easily been avoided if the forest service would have been required to have public comment before the roads could have been closed. It should be common sense that on public lands, if there is a road or a trail, someone is using it. Probably for recreational purposes and if a closure occurs it will be effecting the public so they must be involved in the process.

I am adding a few pages from newspapers to this to show that we do recreate and do a lot of volunteer work in the national forest. I am also adding a page to show that motorized recreation does create very positive impacts to local economies. Local economies depend a lot on recreations in the national forests. Please let the people have public comment on road and trail closures because the impacts of road closures could put people out of a job.

In conclusion, I'd like to thank you for the honor of testifying before your sub-committee on this important topic. Please do your best to help it succeed.

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